

NASA News



National Aeronautics and
Space Administration
Goddard Space Flight Center
Wallops Flight Facility
Wallops Island, VA 23337-5099

Betty Flowers
elizabeth.b.flowers.1@gsfc.nasa.gov
Telephone: 757-824-1584

Release: March 8, 2001

Dolores Beasley
Headquarters, Washington, DC
(Phone: 202-358-1753)

RELEASE NO.: 01-09

ULDB "GO" FOR SECOND LAUNCH TO THE EDGE OF SPACE

Slowly rising from the Northern Territory of Australia, a massive NASA balloon will again try to begin a journey that will take it around the world on the fringes of space. NASA has given the go-ahead for the second test flight of the Ultra Long Duration Balloon (ULDB).

The next launch opportunity for ULDB could come as early as tomorrow from Alice Springs, Australia.

On Feb. 25, the first full-scale test flight of the giant balloon ended just over four hours into the flight. ULDB had reached an altitude of approximately 85,000 feet when it developed a leak. The flight was terminated and the balloon's science payload was recovered in excellent condition. However, the launch window has closed for the science mission, so the sequel flight will not carry a science experiment.

"A review team examined the recovered balloon and data from the flight and identified a possible weakness in the experimental balloon material that may have contributed to the first flight failure," said Steve Smith, Chief of the Balloon Program Office at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center's Wallops Flight Facility, Wallops Island, VA. "We have determined that it is best to proceed with the second test flight using a duplicate balloon. This flight will allow us to further study the material in the flight environment and obtain extended flight performance data."

-more-

-2-

"Three to four inches of rain this week has completely saturated the launch area, but we're hopeful it will have dried out enough by the end of this week to conduct the flight," Smith added.

The ULDB floats above 99 percent of the Earth's atmosphere and can carry a 4,500 pound (2,038 kilogram) payload. It is the largest-single cell, fully sealed balloon ever flown. While the test flight is expected to last only about two weeks and circumnavigate the globe, the ULDB is designed to support missions for up to 100 days. Balloons provide cost-effective platforms for near-space observations.

The Wallops Flight Facility manages NASA's scientific balloon program for the Office of Space Science, Washington, DC. Launch operations are conducted by the National Scientific Balloon Facility, Palestine, TX, which is managed for NASA by the Physical Sciences Laboratory of New Mexico State University, Las Cruces. Australian operational support to NASA is provided by the Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organization.

For more information on the ULDB mission and to track the flight, visit the Internet:

<http://www.wff.nasa.gov/pages/scientificballoons.html>

-end-